

THE DIVA'S RUBY

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SYNOPSIS.

Baraka, a Tartar girl, became enamored of a golden bearded stranger who was prospecting and studying herbs in the vicinity of her home in central Asia, and revealed to him the location of a mine of rubies hoping that the stranger would love her in return for her disclosure. They were followed to the cave by the girl's relatives, who blocked up the entrance, and drew off the water supply, leaving the couple to die. Baraka's cousin Saad, her betrothed, attempted to climb down a cliff overlooking the mine, but the traveler shot him. The stranger was rescued from a water gourd Saad carried, dug his way out of the tunnel, and departed, deserting the girl and carrying a bag of rubies. Baraka gathered all the gems she could carry, and started in pursuit. Margaret Donne (Margaria da Cordova), a famous prima donna, became engaged in London to Konstantin Logotheti, a wealthy Greek financier. Her intimate friend was Countess Leven, known as Lady Maud, whose husband had been killed by a bomb in St. Petersburg; and Lady Maud's most intimate friend was Rufus Van Torp, an American, who had become one of the richest men in the world. Van Torp was in love with Margaret, and rushed to London as soon as he heard of her betrothal. He offered Lady Maud \$50,000 for her pet charity if she would aid him in winning the singer from Logotheti. Baraka approached Logotheti at Versailles with rubies to sell. He presented a ruby to Margaret. Van Torp bought a yacht and sent it to Venice. He was visited by Baraka in male attire. She gave him a ruby after the American had told her of having seen in the United States a man answering the description of the one she loved. The American followed Margaret to the Bayreuth "Parsifal" festival. Margaret took a liking to Van Torp, who presented her with the ruby Baraka had given him.

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

"I never heard such an amusing set of stories as you are telling me to-day," she said.
"That particular one is Logotheti's," he answered, "and he can probably tell you much more about the girl."
"Is she really very pretty?" Margaret asked.
"Well," said Van Torp, quoting a saying of his favorite great man, "for



"Send Mr. Van Torp's Man Up, Potts."

people who like that kind of thing, I should think that would be the kind of thing they'd like."
The prima donna smiled.
"Can you describe her?" she asked.
"Did you ever read a fairy story about a mouse that could turn into a tiger when it liked?" inquired the American in a tone of profound meditation, as if he were contemplating a vision which Margaret could not see.
"No," said she, "I never did."
"I don't think I ever did, either. But there might be a fairy story about that, mightn't there?" Margaret nodded, with an expression of displeased interest, and he went on: "Well, it describes Miss Barrack to a T. Yes, that's what I call her. She's put 'Barak' on her business card, whatever that means in a Christian language; but when I found out it was a girl, I christened her Miss Barrack. People have to have names of some kind if you're going to talk about them. But that's a digression. Pardon me. You'd like a description of the young person. I'm just thinking."
"How did you find out she was a girl?" Margaret asked, and her tone was suddenly hard.
"It was a question of form, you see," he said awkwardly.
"Form? Formality? I don't understand." Margaret was really puzzled.

enthusiasm than he had shown yet. "They're as small and even and white as if somebody had gone to work and carved them all around half a new billiard ball, not separate, you understand, but all in one piece. Very pretty mouth they make, with those rather broiled-salmon-colored lips she has, and a little chin that points up, as if she could hold her own. She can, too, her hair? Well, you see, she's cut it short, to be a boy, but it's as thick as a beaver's fur, I should say, and pretty black. It's a silky kind of hair, that looks alive. You know what I mean, I daresay. Some brunettes' hair looks coarse and dusky, like horsehair, but hers isn't that kind, and it makes a sort of reflection in the sun, the way a young raven's wing-feathers do, if you understand."
"You're describing a raving beauty. It seems to me."
"Oh, no," said the American innocently. "Now if our friend Griggs, the novelist were here, he'd find all the right words and things, but I can only tell you just what I saw."
"You tell it uncommonly well!" Margaret's face expressed anything but pleasure. "Is she tall?"
"It's hard to tell, in men's clothes. Three inches shorter than I am, maybe. I'm a middle-sized man, I suppose. I used to be five feet ten in my

shoes. She may be five feet seven, not more."

"But that's tall for a woman!"
"Is it?" Mrs. Van Torp's tone expressed an innocent indifference.
"Yes. Has she nice hands?"
"I didn't notice her hands. Oh, yes, I remember!" he exclaimed, suddenly correcting himself. "I did notice them. She held up that ruby to the light and I happened to look at her fingers. Small, well-shaped fingers, tapering nicely, but with a sort of firm look about them that you don't often see in a woman's hands. You've got it, too."

"Have I?" Margaret looked down at her right hand. "But, of course, hers are smaller than mine," she said.
"Well, you see, orientals almost all have very small hands and feet—too small I call them—little tiny feet like mice."

Margaret's own were well-shaped, but by no means small.
"The girl is in London, you say?" Her tone made a question of the statement.

"She was there two days ago, when I left. At least, she had been to see me that very morning. Almost as soon as she was gone I went out, and in the first shop I looked into I met Logotheti. It was Pinney's, the jeweler, I remember, for I bought a collar stud. We came away together and walked some time, and he told me the Tartar girl's story. I asked him to dine to-day, but I was obliged to leave town suddenly, and so I had to put him off with a note. I daresay he's still in London."

"I daresay he is," Margaret repeated, and rising suddenly she went to the window.
Mr. Van Torp rose too, and thought of what he should say in taking his leave of her, for he felt that he had stayed long enough.

The prima donna was still looking out of the window when the door opened and her English maid appeared on the threshold. Margaret turned at the sound.
"What is it?" she asked quietly.

"There's Mr. Van Torp's man, ma'am," answered Potts. "He wants to speak to his master at once."

"You had better tell him to come up," Margaret answered. "You may just as well see him here without going all the way downstairs," she said, speaking to Van Torp.

"You're very kind, I'm sure," he replied; "but I think I'd better be going, anyway."
"No, don't go yet, please! There's something else I want to say. See your man here while I go and speak to Mrs. Rushmore. Send Mr. Van Torp's man up, Potts," she added, and left the room.

The American walked up and down alone for a few moments. Then the impassive Stemp was ushered in by the maid, and the door was shut again.
"Well?" inquired Mr. Van Torp. "Has anything happened?"

"Yes, sir," Stemp answered. "They have turned us out of the house, sir, and your luggage is in the street. Where shall I have it taken, sir?"
"Oh, they've turned us out, have they? Why?"

"Well, sir, I'm afraid it's partly my fault, but there must be some misunderstanding, for I'm quite sure I didn't whistle in your room, sir."
"So am I, Stemp. Quite so. Go on. What happened?"

"Well, sir, you hadn't been gone more than ten minutes when somebody knocked, and there was the landlord, and that's what he calls himself, and a strange German gentleman with him, who spoke English. Rather shabby-looking, sir, I thought him. He spoke most uncivilly, and said I was driving him half crazy with my whistling. I said I hadn't whistled, and he said I had, and the landlord talked German at me, as it were, sir. I said again I hadn't whistled, and he said I had, the shabby gentleman, I mean, speaking most uncivilly, sir, I assure you. So when I saw that they doubted my word, I put them out and fastened the door, thinking this was what you would have ordered, sir, if you'd been there yourself, but I'm afraid I did wrong."

"No, Stemp. You didn't do wrong." "Thank you, sir."
"I suppose, though, that when you put them out they didn't exactly want to go, did they?"

"No, sir, but I had no trouble with them."
"Any heads broken?"

"No, sir, I was careful of that. I sent the landlord downstairs first, as he was a fat man and not likely to hurt himself, and the shabby gentleman went down on top of him quite comfortably, so he did not hurt himself either. I was very careful, sir, being in a foreign country."

"What happened next? They didn't come upstairs again and throw you out, I suppose?"

"No, sir. They went and got two of these German policemen with swords, and broke into the room, and told me we must move at once. I didn't like to resist the police, sir. It's sometimes serious. The German gentleman wanted them to arrest me, so I offered to pay any fine there was for having been noisy, and we settled for two sovereigns, which I thought dear, sir, and I'd have gone to the police station rather than pay it, only I knew you'd need my services in this heathen town, sir. I'm highly relieved to know that you approve of that, sir. But they said we must turn out directly, just the same, so I re-packed your

things and got a porter, and he's standing over the luggage in the street, waiting for orders."

"Stemp," said Mr. Van Torp, "I'd been whistling myself, before you came in, and the lunatic in the next room had already been fussing about it. It's my fault."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."
"And it will be my fault if we have to sleep in a cab to-night."

The door opened while he was speaking, and Margaret heard the last words as she entered the room.

"I'm sorry," she said, "I thought you had finished. I could not help hearing what you said about sleeping in a cab. That's nonsense, you know."

"Well," said Mr. Van Torp, "they've just turned us out of the one room we had because I whistled 'Parsifal' out of tune."

"You didn't whistle it out of tune," Margaret answered, to Stemp's great but well-concealed astonishment. "I know better. Please have your things brought here at once."

"Here?" repeated Mr. Van Torp, surprised in his turn.

"Yes," she answered, in a tone that forestalled contradiction. "If nothing else can be had you shall have this room. I can do without it."

"You're kindness itself, but I couldn't do that," said Mr. Van Torp. "Bring our things to this hotel, anyway, Stemp, and we'll see what happens."

"Yes, sir."
Stemp disappeared at once, and his master turned to Margaret again.

"Nothing will induce me to put you to such inconvenience," he said, and his tone was quite as decided as hers had been.

She smiled.
"Nothing will induce me to let a friend of mine be driven from pillar to post for a lodging while I have plenty of room to spare!"

"You're very kind, but—"
"But the mouse may turn into a tiger if you contradict it," she said with a light laugh that thrilled him with delight. "I remember your description of the Tartar girl!"

"Well, then, I suppose the hyena will have to turn into a small woolly lamb if you tell him to," answered Mr. Torp.

"Yes," laughed Margaret. "Be a small, woolly lamb at once, please, a very small one!"

"Knee-high to a kitten; certainly," replied the millionaire submissively.

"Very well. I'll take you with me to hear 'Parsifal' to-morrow, if you obey. I've just asked Mrs. Rushmore if it makes any difference to her, and she has confessed that she would rather not go again, for it tires her dreadfully and gives her a headache. You shall have her seat. What is it? Don't you want to go with me?"

Mr. Van Torp's face had hardened till it looked like a mask, he stared firmly at the wall, and his lips were set tightly together. Margaret gazed at him in surprise while he spoke have counted ten. Then he spoke slowly, with evident effort, and in an odd voice.

"Excuse me, Miss Donne," he said, snapping his words out. "I'm so grateful that I can't speak, that's all. It'll be all right in a second."

A huge emotion had got hold of him. She saw the red flush rise suddenly above his collar, and then sink back before it reached his cheeks, and all at once he was very pale. But not a muscle of his face moved, not a line was drawn; only his sandy eyelashes quivered a little. His hands were thrust deep into the pockets of his jacket, but the fingers were motionless.

Margaret remembered how he had told her more than once that she was the only woman the world held for him, and she had thought it was nonsense, rather vulgarly and clumsily expressed by a man who was not much better than an animal where women were concerned.

It flashed upon her at last that what he had said was literally true, that she had misjudged an extraordinary man altogether, as many people did, and that she was indeed the only woman in the whole world who could master and dominate one whom many feared and hated, and whom she had herself once detested beyond words.

While these thoughts were disturbing her a little, Mr. Van Torp recovered himself; his features relaxed, his hands came out of his pockets, and he slowly turned towards her.

"I hope you don't think me rude," he said awkwardly. "I feel things a good deal sometimes, though people mightn't believe it."

They were still standing near together, and not far from the door through which Margaret had entered.

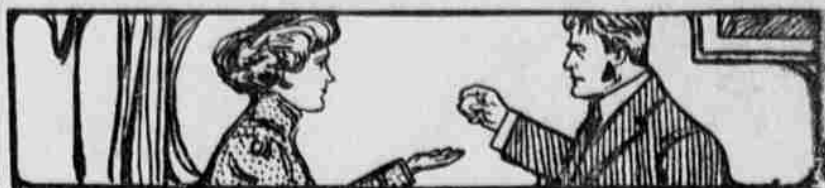
"It's never rude to be grateful, even for small things," she answered gently.

Her handsome head was a little bent, and her eyes were turned to the floor as she passed him going to the door.

"I'm going to see the manager of the hotel," she said. "I'll be back directly."

"No, no! Please let me—"
But she was gone, the door was shut again, and Mr. Van Torp was left to his own very happy reflections for a while.

Not for long, however. He was still standing before the table staring at the corn-flowers and poppies without consciously seeing them when he was aware of the imposing presence of Mrs. Rushmore, who had entered softly during his reverie and was almost at his elbow.



"This is Mr. Van Torp, I presume," she said gravely, inclining her head. "I am Mrs. Rushmore. You have perhaps heard Miss Donne speak of me."

"I'm very pleased to meet you, Mrs. Rushmore," said the American, bowing low. "I've often heard Miss Donne speak of you with the greatest gratitude and affection."

"That's nice," Mrs. Rushmore answered with gravity, and as she established herself on the sofa she indicated a chair not far from her.

It was only proper that Margaret should always speak of her with affection and gratitude. Mr. Van Torp sat down on the chair to which she had directed rather than invited him; and he prepared to be bored to the full extent of the bearable.

"I had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Rushmore," he said in the proper tone of mournfully retrospective admiration. "He was sincerely lamented by all our business men."

"He was," assented the widow, as she would have said amen in church, in the right place, and with much the same solemn intonation.

There was a moment's pause, during which the millionaire was trying to think of something else she might like to hear, for she was Margaret's friend, and he wished to make a good impression. He was therefore not prepared to hear her speak again before he did, and much less for the subject of conversation she introduced at once.

"You know our friend, Mons. Logotheti, I believe?" she inquired suddenly.

"Why, certainly," answered Van Torp, brightening at once at the mention of his rival, and at once also putting on his moral armor of caution. "I know him quite well."

"Indeed? Have you known many Greeks, may I ask?"

"I've met one or two in business, Mrs. Rushmore, but I can't say I've known any as well as Mr. Logotheti."

"You may think it strange that I should ask you about him at our first meeting," said the good lady, "but I'm an American, and I cannot help feeling that a fellow-countryman's opinion of a foreigner is very valuable. You are, I understand, an old friend of Miss Donne's, though I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before, and you have probably heard that she has made up her mind to



Margaret Gazed at Him in Surprise While She Might Have Counted Ten.

marry Mons. Logotheti. I am bound to confess, as her dear mother's oldest friend, that I am very apprehensive of the consequences. I have the gravest apprehensions, Mr. Van Torp."

"Have you, really?" asked the millionaire, with caution, but sympathetically. "I wonder why?"

"A Greek!" said Mrs. Rushmore, sadly. "Think of a Greek!"

Mr. Van Torp, who was not without a sense of humor, was inclined to answer that, in fact, he was thinking of a Greek at that very moment. But he abstained.

"There are Greeks and Greeks, Mrs. Rushmore," he answered wisely. "That is true," answered the lady, "but I should like your opinion, as one of our most prominent men of business—as one who, if I may say so, has of late triumphantly established his claim to respect." Mr. Van Torp bowed and waved his hand in acknowledgment of this high praise. "I should like your opinion about this—er—this Greek gentleman whom my young friend insists upon marrying."

"Really, Mrs. Rushmore—"

"Because if I thought there was unhappiness in store for her I would save her, if I had to marry the man myself!"

Mr. Van Torp wondered how she would accomplish such a feat.

"Indeed?" he said very gravely.

"I mean it," answered Mrs. Rushmore.

There was a moment's silence, during which Mr. Van Torp revolved something in his always active brain, while Mrs. Rushmore looked at him as if she expected that he would doubt her determination to drag Logotheti to the matrimonial altar and marry him by sheer strength, rather than let Margaret be his unhappy bride. But Mr. Van Torp said something quite different.

"May I speak quite frankly, though we hardly know each other?" he asked.

"We are both Americans," answered the good lady, with a grand national air. "I should not expect anything but perfect frankness of you."

"The truth is, Mrs. Rushmore, that ever since I had the pleasure of knowing Miss Donne, I have wanted to marry her myself."

"You!" cried the lady, surprised beyond measure, but greatly pleased.

"Yes," said Mr. Van Torp quietly, "and therefore, in my position, I can't give you an unbiased opinion about Mr. Logotheti. I really can't."

"Well," said Mrs. Rushmore, "I am surprised!"

While she was still surprised Mr. Van Torp tried to make some running, and asked an important question.

"May I ask whether, as Miss Donne's oldest friend, you would look favorably on my proposal, supposing she were free?"

Before Mrs. Rushmore could answer, the door opened suddenly, and

she could only answer by an energetic nod and a look which meant that she wished Mr. Van Torp success with all her excellent heart.

"It's quite settled!" Margaret cried, as she entered. "I've brought the director to his senses, and you are to have the rooms they were keeping for a Russian prince who has not turned up!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Small Fortune for Trapper. The skin of a black fox is worth \$1,000.